

‘Are we protecting the United States? Who knows? You don’t think of your military in Africa.’
GINGER RUSSELL, an aunt of Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, who was killed in an ambush in Niger



American Special Forces troops observing Nigerien soldiers during a nighttime training exercise last year in Diffa, Niger.

A Risky Patrol, a Desert Ambush
And New Anguish Over ‘an Endless War’

This article is by **Rukmini Callimachi, Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Alan Blinder and Thomas Gibbons-Neff.**

KOLLO, Niger — Cut off from their unit, the tiny band of American soldiers was outnumbered and outgunned in the deserts of Niger, fighting to stay alive under a barrage of gunfire from fighters loyal to the Islamic State.

Jogging quickly at a crouch, Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black motioned to the black S.U.V. beside him to keep moving. At the wheel, Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright tried to steer while leaning away from the gunfire. But the militants, wielding assault rifles and wearing dark scarves and balaclavas, kept closing in.

Sergeant Black suddenly went down.

With one hand, Sergeant Wright dragged his wounded comrade to the precarious shielding of the S.U.V. and took up a defensive position, his M4 carbine braced on his shoulder.

“Black!” yelled a third American soldier, Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson, checking for the wounds. Sergeant Black lay on his back, motionless and unresponsive.

Cornered, Sergeant Wright and Sergeant Johnson finally took off, sprinting through the desert under a hail of fire. Sergeant Johnson was hit and went down, still alive.

At that point, Sergeant Wright stopped running. With only the thorny brush for cover, he turned and fired at the militants advancing toward his fallen friend.

These were the last minutes in the lives of three American soldiers killed on Oct. 4

during an ambush in the desert scrub of Niger that was recorded on a military helmet camera. A fourth American, Sgt. La David Johnson, who had gotten separated from the group, also died in the attack — the largest loss of American troops during combat in Africa since the 1993 “Black Hawk Down” debacle in Somalia.

The four men, along with four Nigerien soldiers and an interpreter, were killed in a conflict that few Americans knew anything about, not just the public, but also their families and even some senior American lawmakers.

The deaths set off a political storm in Washington, erupting into a bitter debate over how the families of fallen soldiers should be treated by their commander in

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To Create Rifts,
Russians Liked
Facebook Most
Prosecutors Single Out
a Social Network

By **SHEERA FRENKEL and KATIE BENNER**

SAN FRANCISCO — In 2014, Russians working for a shadowy firm called the Internet Research Agency started gathering American followers in online groups focused on issues like religion and immigration. Around mid-2015, the Russians began buying digital ads to spread their messages. A year later, they tapped their followers to help organize political rallies across the United States.

Their digital instrument of choice for all of these actions? Facebook and its photo-sharing site Instagram.

The social network, more than any other technology tool, was singled out on Friday by the Justice Department when prosecutors charged 13 Russians and three companies for executing a scheme to subvert the 2016 election and support Donald J. Trump’s presidential campaign. In a 37-page indictment, officials detailed how the Russians repeatedly turned to Facebook and Instagram, often using stolen identities to pose as Americans, to sow discord among the electorate by creating Facebook groups, distributing divisive ads and posting inflammatory images.

While the indictment did not accuse Facebook of any wrongdoing, it provided the first comprehensive account from the authorities of how critical the company’s platforms had been to the Russian campaign to disrupt the 2016 election. Facebook and Instagram were mentioned 41 times, while other technology that the Russians used were featured far less. Twitter was named nine times, YouTube once, and electronic payments company PayPal 11 times.

It is unprecedented for an American technology company to be so central to what the authorities say was a foreign scheme to commit election fraud in the United States. The indictment further batters Facebook’s image after it has spent months grappling

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NEWS ANALYSIS
Trump Quiet
In a U.S. War
On Meddling
Seeing Vindication in
Mueller’s Indictments

By **PETER BAKER**

WASHINGTON — After more than a dozen Russians and three companies were indicted on Friday for interfering in the 2016 elections, President Trump’s first reaction was to claim personal vindication: “The Trump campaign did nothing wrong — no collusion!” he wrote on Twitter.

He voiced no concern that a foreign power had been trying for nearly four years to upend American democracy, much less resolve to stop it from continuing to do so this year.

The indictment secured by the special counsel, Robert S. Mueller III, underscored the broader conclusion by the American government that Russia is engaged in a virtual war against the United States through 21st-century tools of disinformation and propaganda, a conclusion shared by the president’s own senior advisers and intelligence chiefs. But it is a war being fought on the American side without a commander in chief.

In 13 months in office, Mr. Trump has made little if any public effort to rally the nation to confront Moscow for its intrusion or to defend democratic institutions against continued disruption. His administration has at times called out Russia or taken action, and even Mr. Trump’s national security adviser, speaking in Germany on Saturday, called evidence of Russian meddling “incontrovertible.” But the administration has been left to respond without the president’s leadership.

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ELECTION TROLLING Experts say that the meddling clearly “points at the Kremlin.” PAGE 20

A RUSSIAN DIVIDE The Trump administration is still at odds over how to view Moscow. PAGE 21

Uber Fees Pay for Road Repairs,
Subway Upgrades, Even Schools

By **WINNIE HU**

In Chicago, a 15-cent fee on Uber, Lyft and other ride-hailing services is helping to pay for track, signal and electrical upgrades to make the city’s trains run faster and smoother.

Ride-hailing trips in Philadelphia are expected to raise \$2.6 million this year for the city’s public schools through a 1.4 percent tax that will also generate more than a million dollars for enforcement and regulation of the ride-hailing industry itself. In South Carolina, a 1 percent ride-hailing fee has yielded more than a million dollars for municipalities and counties to spend as they choose.

And Massachusetts began collecting 20 cents for every ride-hailing trip this month, earmarking the revenue to improve roads and bridges, fill a state transportation fund and even help a rival — the struggling taxi industry — adapt with new technologies and job training.

As ride-hailing services become a dominant force across the country, they have increased congestion, threatened taxi industries and posed political and legal challenges for cities and states struggling to regulate the high-tech newcomers. But they are also proving to be an unexpected boon for municipalities that are increasingly latching onto their success — and being rewarded with millions in revenue to pay not only for transportation and infrastructure needs, but also a host of programs and services that have nothing to do with the ride-hailing apps.

Now New York is seeking to join this growing wave with a new surcharge on ride-hailing and taxi trips that could become a central piece of an ambitious congestion pricing plan for Manhattan. A state task force has proposed fees of \$2 to \$5 per ride that would be among the highest in the nation — and could generate up to \$605 million a year for the city’s failing subway system.

“We used to have yellow cabs, we now have yellow cabs and black cars and green cars and every color in the rainbow and they cruise downtown Manhattan to

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Profits, Not Diplomacy, Draw a Trump to India

By **MARIA ABI-HABIB and ERIC LIPTON**

GURGAON, India — When the Trump family jet lands in India this week, the family member taking a tour of the world’s largest democracy — with a Secret Service detail in tow — won’t be the president on a diplomatic mission. It will be his eldest son, Donald Trump Jr., on a sales trip.

But Indians might be forgiven for not making much of the distinction.

The visit by the younger Mr. Trump, intended to help sell more than \$1 billion in luxury residential units being built by the Trumps and their local partners, has been promoted with newspaper advertisements that read: “Trump has arrived. Have you?”

The younger Mr. Trump’s week-long itinerary of cocktail parties, dinners and events with real estate brokers, business leaders and prospective buyers comes as President Trump is working to strengthen ties between the two countries.

The president, who enjoys widespread popularity in India, was greeted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a bear hug in Washington last June, and the two

leaders have frequently discussed greater military cooperation and ramping up trade. Mr. Trump has also taken a harder line toward Pakistan and China, two of India’s rivals. Two weeks ago, President Trump phoned Mr. Modi pledging “to strengthen security and economic cooperation” between India and the United States.

The overlap in India between father and son creates a spectacle with few parallels in business and diplomacy.

The younger Mr. Trump is scheduled to arrive on Monday on a Boeing 757 nicknamed Trump Force One, because the president crisscrossed the United States on the plane during the campaign.

The Trump family earned as much as \$3 million in royalties in 2016 from ventures in India, according to the president’s financial disclosure report. And Ivanka Trump made her own trip to India in November, in her capacity as a

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The site of a Trump complex under construction near New Delhi.

Florida Inquiry
Found Suspect
Was a Low Risk

This article is by **Audra D. S. Burch, Frances Robles and Patricia Mazzei.**

PARKLAND, Fla. — A Florida social services agency conducted an in-home investigation of Nikolas Cruz after he exhibited troubling behavior nearly a year and a half before he shot and killed 17 people at his former high school in Florida, a state report shows.

The agency, the Florida Department of Children and Families, had been alerted to posts on Snapchat of Mr. Cruz cutting his arms and expressing interest in buying a gun, according to the report. But after visiting and questioning Mr. Cruz at his home, the department determined he was at low risk of harming himself or others.

The report is the latest indication that Mr. Cruz was repeatedly identified by local and federal agencies as a troubled young man with violent tendencies. The F.B.I. admitted on Friday that it had failed to investigate a tip called

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INTERNATIONAL 4-14
New Leader, Same Doubts
President Cyril Ramaphosa heralded a “new dawn” in South Africa, but many people who have lost hope in their party expected little would change. PAGE 12

NATIONAL 15-22
Sick, and Homesick
The United States flew patients out of the hurricane-battered Virgin Islands for dialysis treatments. Five months later, they’re still in Atlanta. PAGE 15

SUNDAY BUSINESS
Office Space Is Just the Start
The ambitious founders of WeWork, a global network of shared office spaces, want nothing less than to transform the way we work, live and play. PAGE 1

SPORTSSUNDAY
No Medal, but a Lot of Sparkle
With nothing left to lose but pride in the free skate, Nathan Chen took some risks, and they finally paid off, Juliet Macur writes. PAGE 1

SUNDAY REVIEW
David Leonhardt PAGE 2

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